

# Work Force Diversity

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Soil  
Conservation  
Service



## HIGHLIGHTS

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### Meeting the Challenge - Work Force Diversity by 2000

In November of 1990, one of the largest, most diverse groups in SCS history assembled in Sparks, Nevada. They came from all grade levels, all job categories, all races, all religions, all colors. Some overcame physical handicaps to make the trip. All of them came to learn more about USDA's Framework for Change and how the increasingly multi-cultural work force will change the face of our agency.

The overall goal of Framework for Change is this:

"to build a diverse work force approximating the Nation's labor force at entry, mid, senior and executive levels and ensure that this work force delivers programs in an efficient, effective, and fair manner by the year 2000."

There are several reasons why we are implementing this program. Among them are the findings of a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor. This study revealed that five significant changes are expected to occur in the nation's work force during the next 10 years:

1. The population and the work force will grow more slowly than at any time since the 1930s.
2. The average age of the population and the work force will rise; and the pool of young

3. workers entering the labor market will shrink.
4. More women will enter the work force.

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4. Minorities will be a larger share of new entrants into the labor force.
5. Immigrants will represent the largest share of the increase in both the population and the work force since the first World War.

USDA has been criticized for having a work force that is not representative of the population. The SCS has made a commitment to embrace the current diversity of its work force and to begin now to ensure that, in the future, it is even more representative of the people we serve.



Brian Williams delivered an inspirational message to the conference audience. Brian's life was instantly and dramatically changed as a result of a car accident. In a split second, he went from enjoying a life as a celebrated high school athlete to the virtually immobile life of a paraplegic. Brian did not let this twist of fate ruin his life. He now spends his days helping others in his position as academic counselor for Student Athlete Services at the University of Arizona.

To accomplish this goal, we first needed to seek out the opinions of our current work force and get a

clear picture of where we are now and where we need to be in 10 years. A conference, composed of as much

of a personnel cross section as possible, seemed the ideal place to begin. The conference became a reality in November of 1990. About 480 people attended, each one with a unique opinion as to the significance and impact of a diverse work force.

These were the objectives of the conference:

- To increase the understanding of the work force by managers, supervisors, and employees
- To develop strategies for attaining a diverse work force at the entry-, mid-, and senior management levels
- To strengthen communication systems to better inform managers, employees, and districts about EEO, Civil Rights and work force diversity
- To reaffirm the accountability for work force diversity
- To determine disciplines required to meet the challenge of a diverse work force

### **Definition**

A culturally diverse work force is one in which all employees, regardless of race, color, age, sex, national origin, disability, religion, or marital status, are found in all facets and levels of the organization.

### **The Chief's Commitment**

"Having been newly appointed, one of my first duties as Chief was attending the Work Force Diversity Conference. I found that just as I was making a transition--from the private to the public sector--so too was the agency making a transition. SCS was, and is, preparing to make the changes necessary to meet the work force demands of the



Conference participants listen intently to one of several presentations. Pictured are: (l-r) Maxine Barron, Tom Smith, Alfredo Lopez, Shirley Merritt, Ginger Price, O'Gene Barkemeyer, Sarah Epps, Nat Conner, Father Robert Bowling, and Tom Baughman.



The Work Force Diversity Conference was not just about listening to speakers. Attendees were asked to become members of work groups and make recommendations for improvements. Pictured are: (l-r) Oscar Tobias, Laurie Ho, and Clarence Finley.

upcoming decades. It will be a challenge. As Chief, I am committed to, and fully endorse, all efforts in progress to diversify our work force." --*William Richards, Chief*

### **Much to be Gained by Looking Ahead**

"I have learned we are far more successful in accomplishing our goals when each of our employees possesses a variety of skills and experiences that are different from one another....I don't believe it's any different for this agency. Limiting our work force to only young men with a farm background and an agricultural degree from a land grant college doesn't guarantee success.

All it guarantees is the potential continuation of a 'good old boy' network--a system that, as far as I'm concerned, has come and gone. That's a legacy I don't want to be a part of while I serve in this position. There is too much to be lost by perpetuating it and too much to be gained by looking beyond." --*James R. Moseley, Assistant Secretary*

### **Bringing the Numbers into Focus**

Adis M. Vila, Assistant Secretary for Administration, USDA, reminded the audience that by the year 2000, it is estimated that 80% of the entrants into the work force will be women and minorities. Couple this with the fact that over half of USDA's senior

management will be eligible for retirement within the next four years, and the implications of work force diversity come into focus.

### **"Glory in Diversity"**

Santiago Rodriguez of the Apple Computer Company captured the audience's attention with his presentation of how assumptions and perceptions about individuals based on group stereotypes can be destructive in the work place. One major point of his talk was how work force diversity is different from earlier periods of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action. The message from EEO, according to Rodriguez, was that we should hire and promote



Attendees at the Work Force Diversity conference were selected to serve as representatives of the multi-cultural environment in which we live and work. They were encouraged to celebrate the richness of their cultures at the closing banquet. Pictured are: (l-r) Laurie Ho, Michelle Thurland, Vilma Mendez, Richard Swenson, Chief William Richards, and Maria Montes.

on merit and ignore differences of sex, race, and culture. Affirmative Action made some groups protected and thereby alienated those who felt unprotected. Work force diversity is a third generation movement which says that we should glory in diversity. Recognition of differences can be used to draw on diverse strengths to increase efficiency and competitiveness in the work force and in dealing effectively with clients.

### Conformity is Out

"As world views between Eastern and Western clash in the traditional American work place, it becomes clear that successful organizations can no longer survive by shrugging off diversity and demanding conformity. Resistance to change in

the work place will no doubt be the most severe challenge facing management and older employees. In an atmosphere where change is inevitable, one innovation that may help blunt resistance to change is for management to introduce an apprenticeship and mentoring system into the diverse work place."

--©1990, *Dr. Letha A. See, Keynote Speaker (Used by permission.)*

### Conference Results

As a result of the conference, the Work Force Diversity Task Force was established to consolidate and refine the recommendations resulting from the conference. One of the early recommendations of this task force was that all employees receive copies of the speeches given at the conference. The group has

also finalized reports submitted by the various work group sessions at the conference. Distribution of these reports will be made to all employees.



Adis Vila, Assistant Secretary for Administration, and James Moseley, Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, addressed the audience and spoke of the many changes that are beginning to occur in the work force.

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